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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a 2-year research study at the University of Southampton (England) regarding teachers' and students' beliefs, understandings, and classroom practices with respect to explicit language awareness in three secondary schools. Specifically, the study sought to document the understandings of secondary English and foreign language teachers on the nature of language, beliefs about the role of explicit language awareness in language education, and the way this was realized in their own classroom practices; the beliefs of their 13- and 14-year-old students were also solicited. Data was gathered for the teachers through observation and interviews and through group discussion and problem-solving tasks for the students; both groups were also given selected, individual interviews. Results revealed that most teachers seemed to have made a strategic commitment to building up, over time, a reference model of selected aspects of the target language system. There was less evidence that the pupils were making a conscious use of such models; they were drawing on already-internalized knowledge and employing strategies of a holistic, rather than analytic, nature. Overall findings suggest an association between consciousness-raising activity in these classrooms and the language development of some of the pupils surveyed. (Contains 14 references.) (Author/NAV)

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LANGUAGE AWARENESS AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT: CAN WE TRACE LINKS?

Janet Hooper, Rosamond Mitchell, Christopher Brumfit

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LANGUAGE AWARENESS AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT: CAN WE TRACE LINKS?

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The debate over the place of language awareness in the school curriculum has enjoyed a high profile during the recent development of National Curriculum programmes in Britain. It stretches further back than this, of course. The post-war period had been marked by the rise of experiential approaches in the school language curriculum, and by the marginalisation of traditional 'grammar' teaching in both English and modern foreign languages classrooms. There had been a shift away from the strong and explicit focus on the teaching of grammar which had previously characterised the teaching of foreign languages; similarly, in English mother-tongue classrooms, teachers were espousing 'growth'-oriented philosophies, where the focus was on fostering children's language development through experiential rather than reflective activity. This shift away from traditional approaches to languages teaching drew forth concern in many quarters, and was a contributory factor to the rise of the 'language awareness' movement in Britain throughout the seventies and into the following decade. The eighties saw extensive discussion of the place of language awareness in the school language curriculum, together with implementation of courses (largely by English and foreign languages departments) covering a range of topics such as the structure of language, variation in language use, language variety and change, and child language acquisition and foreign language learning.

The debate has continued into the nineties, and centres to a large degree on the rationales for the explicit study of language in school. Such rationales have typically focused on the intrinsic interest and value of the study of language in its own right, the social and cultural empowerment it offers, and the enhanced motivation for language learning it provides. Foreign language teachers in particular have argued that motivation for language learning can be significantly improved by the study of topics such as the relationships between different languages, and language development in young children (Donmall 1985). It has further been argued that the study of language is essential to an understanding of the human condition, through awareness of

the nature of social interaction, and of personal identity expressed through language choice (Language Awareness Working Party 1985). Similarly, the Report of the National Curriculum English Working Group has stated the case for explicit language study in terms of the intrinsic interest and value of language as a central factor in individual human development, and has recognised its role in promoting children's understanding of their social and cultural environment (DES/WO 1989).

The most controversial and perhaps potentially most powerful rationale for the explicit study of language remains, however, central to the debate: its contribution to the enhancement of language skills. Can we trace connections between reflection on language and language use? The role of conscious understanding in language learning is a much debated question in the field of second language acquisition research, and one on which there is little consensus (Schmidt 1990). Among those who see little role for conscious knowledge in language learning, Krashen is the most ardent exponent (see Krashen 1982, for example). He has elaborated a theory that distinguishes between 'subconscious' acquisition and 'conscious' learning: he posits that a second language can only be acquired via the first route, where the focus is on meaning, and that conscious learning - through an explicit focus on form - is of little use in spontaneous language production and comprehension. In this view, what is consciously learnt only comes into play in monitoring, or editing, language output after it has been produced, and plays no part in the actual process of language acquisition.

However, there are other theories which allow a role for both explicit and implicit knowledge. Bialystok, for example (1978), has developed a model of second language acquisition based on these two types of knowledge which can interact; she suggests that it is through practice that explicit knowledge can turn into implicit knowledge. Thus, 'learning' can become 'acquisition' if it is sufficiently practised. Elsewhere, Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (Sharwood Smith 1980; Rutherford and Sharwood Smith 1985; Rutherford 1987) have argued for 'consciousness-raising', or 'input enhancement', as is later preferred (Sharwood Smith 1993), as a way of facilitating the development of second language knowledge through a deliberate focus on the formal properties of language, in the belief that this will enhance the language learning process.

A third, related position recognises that there is a variety of learner styles, ranging from the careful to the vernacular (see Tarone 1983). The kind of language use engaged in by learners determines the kind of knowledge they acquire; similarly, different kinds of knowledge are used in different types of language performance. Bialystok's model (1984) posits two dimensions of language proficiency, analysed and automatic; the early stages of second language learning tend to be characterised by knowledge that is non-automatic and unanalysed. As learning takes place, awareness increases, and linguistic knowledge gradually becomes analysed by the learner - although Bialystok argues that this does not necessarily operate at the level of consciousness. Analysed knowledge, however, facilitates the development of metalinguistic knowledge; and it is also available to the learner for particular kinds of language use, perhaps more particularly in written production (as opposed to, say, everyday conversation).

Ellis (1985) examines these three positions, the 'non-interface', 'interface' and 'variability' positions, in relation to existing empirical research and the question of how far classroom instruction should aim to raise learners' consciousness of the formal properties of the target language, although the available evidence does not point in the direction of any firm conclusion. This paper seeks to shed a little further light on the debate, by asking whether we can trace links between explicit language knowledge and learners' language use, specifically in the production of written foreign-language text.

The over-arching aim of the two-year research study at the University of Southampton (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, 1991-1993) was to address the lack of empirical evidence regarding teachers' and pupils' beliefs, understandings and classroom practices in respect of explicit language awareness. Specifically, the study sought to document the understandings of secondary English and foreign languages teachers regarding the nature of language, their beliefs about the role of explicit language awareness in language education, and the way these were realised in their own classroom practices. It also aimed to explore their 13-14 year old pupils' understandings of language, and the ways in which these pupils appeared to make use of explicit language awareness and knowledge in the course of classroom activities and assignments. In three case-study schools in the school year 1991-1992, the teachers' beliefs and practices were documented through

both observation and interview; and the pupils' understandings and knowledge were explored through a range of group discussion and problem-solving tasks. (See Mitchell, Hooper & Brumfit 1994 for an overview report on the project.)

A further, and more tentative, aim was to explore relationships between knowledge and understanding of language and the development of the pupils' mother-tongue and foreign language skills. This final aim was necessarily more tentative, as we were well aware that a descriptive study could provide no definitive answers on any cause-effect relationships which might obtain between explicit language study and the development of language skills. However, given the centrality of this issue in debates about rationales for explicit language study, we were concerned to address it at least in a preliminary way.

The research activity that related most directly to this question comprised a series of interviews with individual pupils and their teachers, focusing on texts recently produced by the pupils in the normal course of their classwork in English and modern foreign languages; here we shall look specifically at some of the foreign languages texts. The purpose of these interviews was to explore the ways in which pupils set about the production of texts, the guidance they were given, and the terms in which texts produced were subsequently evaluated by pupils and teachers. We were interested in learning more about the kinds of analytic ability pupils might display, and the extent to which reference to explicit understanding and knowledge of language would be made, both in talk about the text creation process and also in retrospective evaluation of texts as products. Was it the case that, in the production of relatively considered, classroom-generated texts, pupils could and did draw on explicit understanding or knowledge of language? Did it appear that such explicit language awareness and knowledge had contributed in any significant way to the nature and quality of the texts produced?

In the final fieldwork term (summer 1992), the teachers involved with the project were asked to suggest texts recently or currently being produced by their pupils for this activity. There were five foreign language classes altogether: three French, of which two were upper sets and one was mixed-ability, one lower-set German, and one second-language Spanish group composed of pupils selected on the basis of their previous success in French. Written texts

were suggested by three of the four foreign languages teachers (the teacher of Spanish suggested an oral role-play). The three teachers of French all coincidentally suggested the same type of text, a letter to an imagined pen-pal, though the contexts in which these had been produced were different. One class had produced their letters in the context of a class test, while the other two had been set the task for classwork/homework. The teacher of French and German suggested for her lower-set German group a classwork exercise involving production of individual sentences.

In order to select pupils for individual interview, the teachers were then asked to rank all pupils in the class according to whether they were perceived as weak, average or high in ability in the subject. The researcher then aimed to interview two pupils drawn from each of these groups, making a total of six pupils per class. (In the event, 17 individual pupil interviews, of around twenty minutes each, were conducted across the three French classes, together with five from the German.) The pupil interviews were complemented with parallel teacher interviews, in which the pieces of work produced by three pupils per class were discussed (one from each ability group).

The interviews were guided by a list of issues to be covered in a flexible way, rather than by a tightly structured schedule of questions. Pupil interviews centred around the following issues:

— the guidance given
— sources of help, and advice used
— pupils' own evaluation of the work
— pupils' perceptions of teacher feedback
— pupils' perceptions of progress in this area.

The teachers were asked to explain and comment on the following:

— the aim behind the activity
— the guidance given
— their evaluation of the piece
— the feedback they would consider appropriate, and why.

All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. A first-stage analysis was then carried out, in which each group of pupil text-based interviews (by school and by subject) was separately analysed, together with the relevant teacher interview. Individual reports were written on each group

of interviews, in which a qualitative interpretation was made of pupil and teacher perceptions and accounts relating to the individual tasks set, using the headings which had originally guided the interviews. The separate task-based papers thus obtained for the foreign languages groups were written up into a more synthetic account which looked for similarities and differences across the classes in the three schools.

There was a divergence in teacher aims and evaluation of the tasks which seemed best accounted for by the teachers' perceptions of their pupils' abilities. In the case of the three teachers of French, a more or less formal agenda of language structure was revealed in the letter-writing task given to their groups:

> It was revision of the basics, and it was the incorporation of 'J'aime', 'je n'aime pas', 'je préfère ... parce que', and then the adjectives ... amongst, you know, amongst the rest, amongst the details about their name, their age, whatever
>
> [School 3, French]

> a writing activity that would suit the whole ability range [...] open-ended enough to let the good ones show what they could do [...] a chance to show that they had an idea of talking in the past, and some extra vocabulary as well [...] I was certainly looking for some of them to be able to come up with some examples of the perfect tense
>
> [School 1, French]

> The whole thing was practising using a future
>
> [School 2, French]

In contrast, the teacher in School 2 had somewhat different aims for her lower-ability German group:

> they had to [...] adapt that sentence to the pictures that they had, they had to put a new name in, they had to put a new amount of pocket money and they had to put new items [...] for some of them it was replacing the vocabulary, for some of them it was just that, and even that was difficult [...] I didn't worry them with this separable verb here, because I think that's beyond what they can worry about
>
> [School 2, German]

Evaluative comments by the pupils were predominantly of the holistic type (e.g. "it was all wrong", "terrible"), with only around a quarter of the comments revealing some inclination to be analytic, for example:

> Well I ... don't think, I think I got all the facts down but I don't know whether it's all in ... proper sentences
>
> [School 1 F, J]

> I think the most marks would have been for the thing that you did last weekend [...] You had to use the pres-, euh past tense
>
> [School 1 F, Sa]

> it looked quite good but, you know, sometimes, you know, these mistakes like the umm the verbs and stuff like this, you know, that I don't understand very much
>
> [School 2 F, P]

Interestingly, the largest number of such comments came from pupils in the French group in School 1, whose classroom had revealed the most explicit teacher commentaries on language (predominantly on French morpho-syntax).

There was also a scattering of pupil comments oriented more towards the function of the text, in terms, for example, of how it might compare to a 'real' letter:

> not the sort of thing I'd write to a French pen-friend [...] If it was like a real letter it would like, be things like about what's happened, like I went ice skating and stuff like that. And I wouldn't exactly be telling them where I lived cause they'd obviously know
>
> [School 1 F, Ki]

When asked about the actual process of creating the texts, the strategies described by pupils varied according to the time and type of help available. The School 1 pupils, producing their letter under the time constraints of a test, seemed to have relied fairly heavily on intuitive strategies. They talked frequently about whether things had looked or sounded right, and guesswork was often mentioned, especially in regard to morphological issues such as gender agreement or the choice of article forms:

> I just guessed [...] 'le jardin' sounded right
>
> [School 1 F, Ki]

> It's just what sounds right and what looks right
>
> [School 1 F, Sa on articles]

> It just comes, cause that's the way we've always done it [...], it just sort of comes, and I goes 'Oh well I'll give that a go' [laughs]
>
> [School 1 F, Ca on perfect tense]

There was also some evidence in pupils' actual texts of the recalling of unanalysed 'chunks', the most obvious case being a high-ability pupil who produced examples such as these:

> J'ai kelage un 14 ans
> Je n'ai parlez vous un Français
>
> [School 1 F, J]

Most pupils' texts showed difficulties at the time of composition in distinguishing between '**je**', '**j'ai**' and '**j'**', for example in 'j'habite' or 'j'ai 14 ans'. Looking back over their texts in interview with the researcher, however, some of them attempted retrospective explanations of apparent inconsistencies in their use of 'je' with various verb forms:

> I think it's cause it's in the, in the present ... tense (...) umm say like 'I am fourteen', not 'I was fourteen' or 'I'm going to be fourteen'
>
> [School 1 F, Sa]

> there's different sort of 'I's [...] cause telling you something about ... sort of saying, that I'm saying that's my name, that's got something afterwards to tell it something ... that's my, that's where, my name, and that's telling you where I sort of live ... it's telling you
>
> [School 1 F, Si]

In School 2, where a stimulus letter was provided and pupils could complete the task in their own time, the main strategy used seemed to be a heavy reliance on the model letter. Discussions with two pupils in particular (one from the 'mid'-ability grouping, one from the 'weak') strongly suggested a tendency to lift whole chunks from the stimulus letter, with little conscious notion of the sense of the constituent parts, only some global understanding of the whole:

> just by looking at it, it looks ... right [...] It just feels as though it looks right
>
> [School 2 F, M]

This was particularly striking in the case of the weaker pupil of these two, who had produced what looked like an impeccable piece of work:

> Cher Philippe,
>
> Bientôt c'est les grandes vacances. Nous avons six semaines de vacances, cette année, j'ai de la chance parce que je vais faire du camping des [sic] les Cornwall en voiture. Je vais partir vendredi prochain avec ['un' crossed out] ma famille. Je vais t'envoyer une carte postale.
>
> [School 2 F, Sa]

However, questioned by the researcher subsequently, she displayed very little comprehension of the meaning of, for example, individual verb phrases or conjunctions:

> P: That one means 'we're going camping in Cornwall'.
> R: [...] which bit means 'we're going'?
> P: Is it 'parce que'?
>
> [School 2 F, Sa: 'parce que' means 'because']

The two pupils identified as 'high' ability, however, copied far less from the model letter. The letter had been written at home initially, without the aid of school reference materials, and the pupils had then been given a follow-up lesson in which to complete it. One of these pupils described the process in this way:

> I'd sort of like left little bits out and when I came into the classroom I filled them in ... so I sort of like looked through the letter again and it had some sentences that I could copy
>
> [School 2 F, P]

The second 'high'-ability pupil seemed to have used the class time to turn the letter she had first written in English (at home) into French as it stood. The three strategies she mentioned - looking at the back of the book, checking with friends or with the teacher - did not include reference to the stimulus letter. Prompted as to the kinds of things she might look up in the back of the book, she replied:

> Words that .. sort of .. umm .. so, you know, how do you say, well "I've been sleeping for sort of seven hours", and you have to find that out .. and you just look up 'sleeping' and .. and you sort of .. work the rest out from there [..] You'd have to put it in a proper sentence .. and .. say 'je vais' or something .. and then put your verb in
>
> [Sch2 F, Z]

Indeed, this pupil (unusually) seemed to have drawn on some such knowledge in producing an exemplary letter. She was able to break her text down quite easily into its constituent parts, and also to talk with some confidence about the building up of sentences, in a way which suggested she had drawn on aspects of conscious language knowledge while writing it. For example, she had correctly used the 'futur proche' several times in her letter, which she said they had worked on in class "quite recently". She explained her approach in this way:

> we had sort of a list of what we had to put in the letter, like umm how long we were going, when, how we were getting there, how we were getting back and when .. so we just had to sort of .. learn the verb and then put it into a sentence
>
> [Sch2 F, Z]

This pupil also reported a guesswork strategy, however, although this was less prominent in her account:

> Well, when I say 'à la' then .. I'm pretty certain that it's 'la' umm but normally I sort of say it through my head and I say 'le' and then I say 'la', and whatever sounds .. sort of better I put [..] normally I sort of rely on guesswork
>
> [Sch2 F, Z]

In School 3, where pupils had a mix of class and homework time to produce notes and then a finished written letter in French, the strategies reported involved mainly an intuitive feel for what sounded or looked right, together with memory of unanalysed chunks and phrases. These pupils spontaneously reported reference to dictionaries, friends or the teacher, in search of vocabulary items, but it seemed they had not regularly referred to available grammar notes to solve sentence construction problems. Where texts had been amended, this had often been in response to the teacher correcting or supplying something. For example, one pupil and her friends, wanting to say when their birthdays were, did not know where to go beyond looking up the content word in the dictionary:

> I didn't know like how it was set out [..] everybody was ask-, on my table that was on the table was asking each other, we couldn't, we could only find 'anniversary', but not like the whole thing in the dictionary, so we asked [the teacher]
>
> [Sch3 F, K]

Another pupil, who had corrected 'je 13 ans' to 'j'ai 13 ans', thought this had been as a result of teacher advice (though he could not remember which was correct, at the time of interview).

These comments from School 3 pupils are interesting in the light of the views from their teacher, who commented explicitly in interview on her view of the link between explicit grammar instruction and the composition process:

> I want them to have that pattern fixed in their brain so they think 'verb, get my verb sorted out, get my tense sorted out with the subject, and my complements, use of adjectives'. If they have that pattern, then they have the confidence to actually approach a piece of writing
>
> [Teacher D, 17.7.92]

Despite their teacher's hopes, however, the pupils surveyed in this class did not, for the most part, seem to have consciously drawn on such language awareness during the actual process of letter composition.

In the School 2 German class, the pupils had been listening to a tape where eight German teenagers talked about their pocket money; they had assembled cut-out picture prompts for each of the teenagers corresponding with the amount of pocket money they received, what they spent it on, and whether they also had a job. Subsequently, they were to stick the pictures in their exercise books, and write sentences about each of the four girls, following the model which the teacher constructed on the board for the first one. The researcher interviews with these pupils revealed a strong reliance on the model sentence:

> [the teacher] did the first one, so it was easy to do these three, cause ... you just had to change a few words around
>
> [Sch2 G, N]

> The first one she wrote on the board and we just had to copy the questions ... down on all of them and write the answers
>
> [Sch2 G, V]

It was equally striking that all but one of the five pupils interviewed appeared to rely heavily on teacher help (this seeming a first resort in the case of the weakest pupils):

> we ask the teacher and she tells us
>
> [Sch2 G, V]

> couldn't do it on our own that much
>
> [Sch2 G, C]

Indeed, one pupil in particular seemed signally to fail to recognise the usefulness of the model sentence; asked whether she and her friend had made use of the example given on the board, she said:

> Didn't bother with that one cause Miss helped us
>
> [Sch2 G, D]

13

The other strategies commonly reported included working with a friend, and checking in the coursebook "to find words" (lexical items):

> most spellings are in the text book
>
> [Sch2 G, D]

Only one of the five pupils interviewed seemed to have much sense of the constituent parts of the sentences, the others evidencing a more global understanding of their overall meaning, apparently aided in large measure by the accompanying picture prompts. One pupil, for instance, offered 'She spends it on her clothes' for 'Sie gibt das Geld fur'; further prompted as to the word for 'clothes' (which was in fact omitted from her incomplete sentence), she replied "'fur, gibt fur', I think". The higher-ability pupil, however, seemed to have grasped the sense of all the constituent parts of 'Sie hat einen Job', and the need to choose between 'keinen' and 'einen' in the writing of the sentences:

> on the pictures, like some of them had umm some of them had jobs, and some of them didn't have jobs, so you put like 'keinen' for no job .. and that, and umm [..] that ['einen'] means she's got a job [..] [means] 'a', I think or 'one'
>
> [Sch2 G, N]

In contrast with the other pupils, then, she seemed well aware of the meaning of both content and structure words; she was also able to analyse individual words into their semantic components, citing 'Taschengeld' as made up of 'pocket' and 'money', and speculating that 'schriften' in 'Zeitschriften' ('magazines') might mean 'writing'. (Indeed, she made a direct link with teacher talk in this respect, "she taught us about that one, 'Taschengeld'".)

In summary then, across the three schools, the pupils' main strategy in generating texts seems to have been to draw on their already-internalised knowledge (itself a mix of lexical and syntactic knowledge with unanalysed chunks and phrases), to employ an intuitive 'what sounds/looks right' strategy. Where a model text was available, weaker pupils tended to bypass their own knowledge store, however, and copied wholesale. Where time allowed, sources such as the coursebook or dictionaries were used to fill lexical gaps, but there was little evidence of any systematic monitoring and checking of syntactic forms against available reference material.

What further emerged very interestingly from the interviews, however, was the pupils' capacity retrospectively to review their work in the light of their own store of explicit grammatical knowledge. Although it seemed rare for connections to be made between such knowledge and the actual process of text creation, it was certainly not the case that pupils were unaware of aspects of the target language grammars. Across three of the four classes (the exception being the lower-ability German group), pupils displayed evidence of explicit language awareness in this respect, many of them were able, for example, to talk (albeit with varying degrees of confidence) about aspects of verb morphology and gender, and retrospectively to evaluate their work in the light of such knowledge. Representative pupil comments across the three French groups included the following on gender:

> you got different endings [...] 'il' you don't put anything, so it's only one, and if it's 'elle' you put 'e' [...] if it's umm feminine it's more than .. one, you have to put 'e-s'
>
> [Sch2 F, S - 'weak']

> Well, usually it's either feminine or masculine, some things, aren't they? [...] 'windows', say, are masculine ... 'chair' or 'a table' are feminine [...] I think it's most of them. There's only a couple that ... haven't got ... masculine or feminine
>
> [Sch2 F, D - 'high'-ability]

> It's changing the word as well, cause you have to sort of have to change the word, don't you, if it's masculine or feminine [...] either by taking letters off or adding letters on, sort of [...] I think you take letters off for masculine and add them for feminine
>
> [Sch3 F, C - 'high'-ability]

Similarly, in respect of verbs and verb tenses, there was evidence that formal grammar information was explicitly available to pupils. Much class work across the year, in the French groups at least, had centred on the practice of aspects of verb morphology, although the teachers had varied in the extent to which explicit attention had been drawn to these. (With her lower-set German group, the teacher had made a deliberate decision to avoid any consciousness-raising procedures in respect of structure.) Pupils in the French classes therefore had considerable evidence available about the distinctive endings and so forth associated with verb forms, and a wide range of pupil commentary included the following:

like umm saying ... 'I did something' instead of 'I'm doing something', cause that's present tense ... 'I've done something', past tense ... 'I'm going to do something''s ... umm ... future

[Sch1 F, Sa - 'mid'-ability]

that's the dictionary form, that 'aller', and umm we just, she's just told us that umm there's different ways of putting it, according to what's in front of it

[Sch2 F, D - 'mid'-ability]

we've sort of like been learning 'je, tu' and like .. all that, and then writing umm one like 'avoir' is like 'to have', we would write, sort of like write it in English, then rearrange it into French

[Sch3 F, K - 'mid'-ability]

we've been doing about, I think, cause you've got to put an 'r' on the end, haven't you? .. yeah, we've been doing, that's like 'i-r' and 'e-r', and all them verbs [...] it's like the do-, like verb, you change the verb like 'il', 'elle' and all that, and you change it to whatever, like 'i-r'

[Sch3 F, C - 'high'-ability]

Generally, across the three schools, there was a lack of ability to comment on or explain verb morphology with any precision, however; for example, while pupils were for the most part aware that verb forms varied with person, they typically explained this point by citation and illustration, and only a few ventured to formulate more abstract generalisations or rules. Nonetheless, it could be said that a majority of the pupils were developing some explicit awareness of grammatical categories, and of the role of morphology in signalling relationships among them. One 'high'-ability pupil, for example, seemed not to have grasped the principle of the formation of the future in French using 'aller' with the infinitive, as an extract from her letter shows (incorrect usage is highlighted):

Cette année **visiter** à Paris pour deux jours, avec mon école. **Nous arrive** à Paris sur 17 juillet et **nous retourner** sur 19 juillet. **Nous voyage** en avion. Nous allons rester dans un hôtel. **Nous visiter** les monuments historique

[Sch2 F, P]

Indeed, her only correct use of the future using 'aller' ('nous allons rester', 'we're going to stay') occurred in a phrase available for copying in the model letter. However, in interview with the researcher, she revealed a burgeoning awareness of the grammatical categories involved. Commenting on the

teacher's subsequent correction to the opening sentence above, she said "I didn't write like that I was going", and later added:

> you have to, you have to sort of like change it like, if you write 'je' you have to write something else, if you write 'tu' you have to write something else [...] the end bits, the 'e', 'e-r' something [...] we were told like how you change, how you change the end, in class before
>
> [Sch2 F, P]

In a more global comment also, reflecting on her progress over the year, she displayed an increasing sense of structure at work in her experience of learning of the language:

> I think, you know, I have improved [...] because ... I can still like make a full sentence up, before I just used to sort of learn it as single words ... now I can sort of write like as a sentence now [...] because we've been learning stuff, things like how to write in sentences, we're learning different words and which goes with which, like, things like that
>
> [Sch2 F, P]

Such ideas were clearly somewhat fuzzy around the edges, but seemed nonetheless to be gradually coming into place for many of the pupils (in the French classes, at least). What is particularly interesting in the context of the present discussion, however, is the apparent infrequency with which the pupils drew on such explicit understandings in the process of creating texts. There seem, from the evidence available, to have been few connections made between this ability to reflect on the language at their disposal and the use they made of it in generating written text.

One rare example of analysed knowledge being brought into play in the writing process was evidenced in one of the letters, where a pupil had written 'J'aime Guns N'Roses et écouté ma chaine hi-fi', but then crossed out the accent on the final 'e' of the verb 'écouté'. Talking to the researcher, she translated this sentence as 'I like Guns N'Roses and listening to my hi-fi', and explained the correction in this way:

> it didn't need the accent [...] I just know that if you, if you're saying something you did in the past, it's got to have an accent on it, but if it's just like listening, it doesn't need it
>
> [Sch1 F, Ki]

The letters from this class were, however, written under the time constraint of a test, which was presumably less likely to allow for considered use of any explicit language knowledge available to the pupils. Equally striking, though, and perhaps more telling, was some evidence that information needed to complete the verb forms correctly was ignored even when presented very directly. In the section of the test before the letter-writing task, and on the same page, pupils had been required to complete a series of grammar questions on the perfect tense, "say what this family and friends did last weekend". Of the five pupils who had (more or less) correctly inserted 'j'ai regardé' in this section (two had omitted the final accent), only one then went on to use an accurately formed perfect tense in the letter below, where the rubric required (in part) that they say "what you did last weekend". It is interesting to speculate as to the reason for the apparent lack of transfer between these two adjacent parts of the test; and it is tempting to postulate the existence of different 'mind-sets' for the two activities, the one focusing on form, the other (ostensibly) on message.

A further striking example of this question of availability of knowledge in different settings arose in discussion with a pupil in another of the French classes. This 'mid'-ability pupil spontaneously pointed out the 'avoir' paradigm, copied in her exercise book, as something that might be helpful in writing in French, and in that context could explain that "for the 'nous's you write 'we have' and things like that". But in the context of her own letter, a little further into the interview, she was at a loss to explain the meaning of 'nous avons' in 'Nous avons six semaines de vacances'.

In summary, the researcher interviews with teachers and pupils across the three schools show somewhat mixed evidence. In most cases, the teachers seem to have made a strategic commitment to building up, over time, a 'reference model' of selected aspects of the target language system, with two distinct rationales. The first, more implicit rationale seemed to be that the availability of such a model would enable pupils to monitor their language production, and improve its accuracy, especially in writing. Secondly, it was felt that conscious understanding of the language system would enable pupils to move from rote-learning of phrases to a more creative use of the target language system.

However, there was less evidence that the pupils were making conscious use of such models. The interviews suggested that, in the process of creating written text, pupils were largely drawing on already-internalised knowledge, and were for the most part employing strategies of an holistic, rather than analytic, nature. How might this apparent mismatch be accounted for? In terms of the theoretical models discussed at the outset, it might be argued that Krashen's 'monitor' theory accounts very well for the apparent non-transferability of explicit 'learned' knowledge in the process of the writing tasks. Thus, a number of the pupils were only able retrospectively to apply their conscious understandings of the system of the target language to see where they had made mistakes, or to justify their apparently 'intuitive' choices of the correct target forms.

It is also possible, however, to adopt an 'interface' or 'variability' position in respect of the pupils' written output. It will be recalled that, in the ('lower'-ability) German class, any consciousness-raising in respect of structure had largely been avoided by the teacher, as a matter of principle:

> They'll be able to sort of handle set phrases that they've learnt by heart, they won't know whether this is the right form of verb, this is an infinitive, they won't know anything like that [...] that is a limitation, but then I think it's the limitation of what they can cope with
>
> [5.12.91]

This policy was in contrast to the same teacher's treatment of her ('upper'-ability) French group, where it was deemed important to offer the pupils generalisations about the target language system:

> I mean it's probably less important for speaking it, but I think if they're going to communicate something in writing, I think they do need a certain understanding of that
>
> [5.12.91]

It is particularly pertinent, then, to compare the performances and interviews of the sample of pupils in these two groups. The available evidence points to the gradual development, among a majority of the pupil sample in the French group (as, indeed, in the two other French groups surveyed), of some notion of structure at work in their experience of learning the foreign language, of an emerging explicit awareness of grammatical categories. This awareness seems very largely absent among the pupils surveyed in the German group. If the

presence (or otherwise) of such growing awareness of structure is related to the pupils' performance and commentary on the written tasks, some interesting points begin to emerge. The performance of the German sample was generally poor: sentences were left incomplete, or were inappropriately completed. Moreover, the pupils generally seemed to have little recourse when generating the text beyond calling on the teacher to supply the words needed; the only exception was a pupil (perhaps not coincidentally) with a bilingual background (whose parents' first language was Urdu), who was the only one of the five pupils interviewed who seemed to have much sense of the constituent parts of the sentences.

Among the French sample in this school, however, there was evidence that at least some of the pupils were able to put a developing analytical ability to use in reflecting on their written output; as was also true of the pupils surveyed in the other two French groups. The apparent mismatch between these pupils' ability to be retrospectively analytical and their recourse to more intuitive strategies in the actual process of writing might be explained in terms of an 'interface' position. It might be surmised that the teachers' consciousness-raising procedures in the French classes had facilitated the development of explicit grammatical knowledge in (some of) the pupils; and that such conscious 'learning' as had taken place in this way had interacted with the subconscious 'acquisition' of the target language which more meaning-focused instruction had facilitated. In this way, explicit knowledge had turned into implicit knowledge, which had then been undifferentiated in such learner comments (on the process of text production) as "it just sounded / looked right", but which had been more readily available for retrospective commentary on the product.

However, one might equally adopt the 'variability' position, which posits that the kind of language use engaged in by learners determines the kind of knowledge they acquire, and that different kinds of knowledge are used in different types of language performance. There follow from this two corollaries pertinent to this paper: that the production of more considered written text might be expected to draw on more analytical abilities and knowledge; and that the availability of such explicit knowledge might be expected to be determined both by the classroom environment in which learners find themselves, and by the inclinations of individual learners. Sharwood Smith (1993: 176) makes this distinction when he talks of 'consciousness-raising' as

against 'input enhancement', the first term implying that the learner's mental state is altered by the input, the second that the assumption cannot be made that teacher input will necessarily become pupil intake. According to this position, then, we would expect that, where classroom input had allowed, some pupils would have been able to draw on explicit grammatical knowledge in the production of their written texts; and, indeed, this seemed to be the case. Where this appears not to have happened, it might be accounted for in one of two ways: either because the pupils (for whatever reason) did not pick up on grammatical features explicitly highlighted by the teacher, or because the teacher did not employ consciousness-raising procedures in respect of language structure. Thus, in the sample from the three French classes, there was a minority of pupils for whom notions of, for example, verb morphology remained extremely hazy, in spite of classroom input; and, in the German sample, the evidence would seem to indicate a general absence of any developing sense of a structured language system at work.

While the study discussed here cannot claim to provide evidence of any direct causal links, there would nevertheless seem to be an association between consciousness-raising activity in these classrooms and the language development of some of the pupils surveyed. Even if it could be definitively proved that there are classroom foreign language learners whose language development is in no way enhanced by language awareness activities, it would still seem premature to proscribe classroom activities aimed at promoting grammatical awareness, so long as there are some learners ready to benefit from them.

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